'We Turned It On and It Worked'

Begun with Spare Navy Parts And 'Permanently Borrowed' Radio Equipment, WUJC-FM Is Now Fixture on the Airwaves

BY JANE BABLAK '91

Out of a windowed room in a quiet hallway in the lower level of the Recplex, you can hear the last notes of a song escaping. Despite the early hour, a cheery voice picks up where the music leaves off. The voice belongs to Rachelle Carroll. The room is the studio of JCU's radio station, WUJC. The time is 6 a.m.

As d.j. for the Tuesday-morning "Sonrise" show, Carroll spins contemporary Christian songs, offering inspirational messages in between. Despite the early hour, she evidently has a good time, snapping her fingers as she answers frequent phone requests from regular listeners.

Originally known as the "Solid Rock Show" when it first went on the air in 1979, it was the only outlet in Cleveland for contemporary Christian rock, says its creator, Mark Mazzu '82, now a co-pastor of Christ Church of West Houston.

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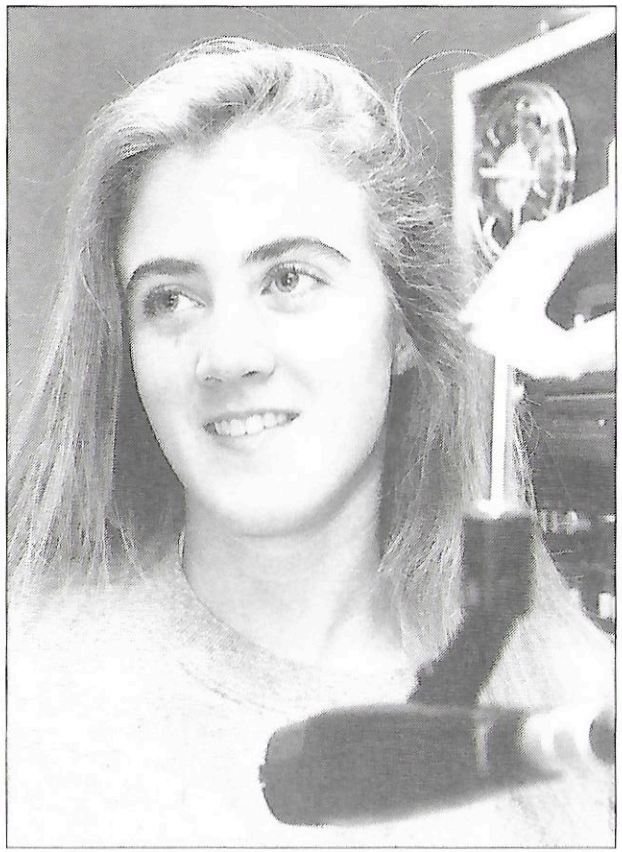

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formal checklist or set of procedures to assess the performance of the equipment, they winged it. "We turned it on and it worked—that's all we knew," Roney says.

Pleased with the results, they climbed to the bell tower (disturbing some slumbering pigeons in the process) of Grasselli, and sat awhile, savoring the moment. "We put something on that would play for awhile," Roney says.

The first official broadcast took place during the 1969 Parent's Weekend, then held in the spring. Roney remembers that "there were radios playing the station all over the campus." And at a special Student Union session in Kulas Auditorium, he held a radio up to the microphone to prove the station was a reality. "It was one of the best days of my life," he says.

Later that year, the station went into full operation, broadcasting from a cramped fourth-floor studio in the Administration Building that had formerly served as a typing room. In the early 70s, the bells in the tower had to be disconnected because they interfered with the broadcast signal. But after numerous requests from faculty, staff and area neighbors (including a plea from a dying woman who wanted to hear the bells again), they were later turned on for a time. In 1977, the signal was increased to 750 watts (and the current 850 watts soon after that).

In 1986, the station vacated the tower for its current quarters, in the basement of the Student Activities Center. For four days one snowy winter break, about 20 students lugged an estimated 10,000 station-owned records across campus.

Dave "Duke" Sipple '86, the station manager at the time, says that while the staff had to trade the tower view for broadcasting in a "fishbowl" of the windowed station, the new visibility worked to their advantage. When the station was in the tower, says Sipple, "people didn't even

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The show that's still heard today began as a spinoff of Mazzu's program. A few younger students, who took to calling him the "Grandfather of Christian rock in Cleveland," started the early-morning tradition of "Sonrise."

Mazzu remembers that his maiden show was marred by a snafu. A half hour into the program, he discovered that in preparing to go on the air, he'd missed one of the switches on the control board. He had been broadcasting only to himself.

Current listeners might assume that WUJC has always been around, but it hasn't. In the 1950's, a small band of student radio enthusiasts got their hands on some surplus Navy radio parts from World War II and cobbled together a system which broadcast from what is now an Art History classroom on the top floor of the Administration building.

Legend has it that after the signal began interfering with other local radio stations and the students' grades plummeted, they were forced to discontinue their efforts.

Chris Colombi '64, now a part-time and fill-in talk host at Cleveland's WERE-AM and an assistant professor of theatre arts at a local community college (see box on next page), was one of "just a handful" of students who worked with the radio equipment. In addition to the Navy parts, the group—more like an informal club—used "permanently borrowed" equipment from commercial stations, Colombi says.

Later, the dorms were wired to receive the AM signal. The only other way to pick up the station, Colombi recalls, was to park near one of the dorms and use a car radio,

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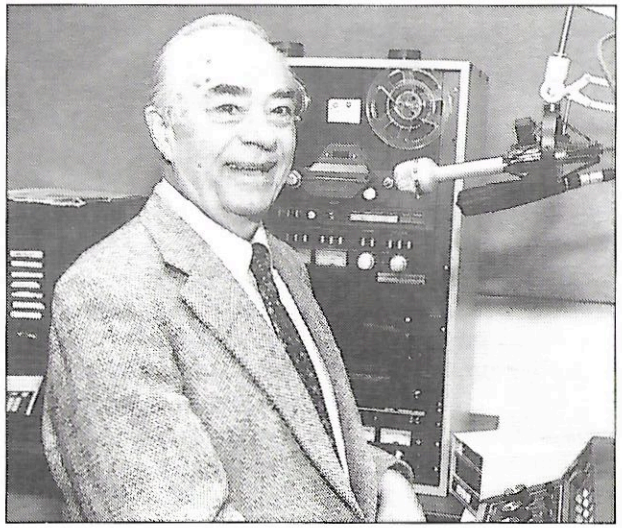
Milton Roney '69, the first director of WJCR (later changed to WUJC on the advice of the Federal Communications Commission, which thought the first choice might cause confusion with similar local call letters), estimates that the total initial cost of the station was $13,500, which was met when the administration agreed to match the $6,500 raised by a voluntary student tax.

Although Roney had to complete a 60-page form to win a construction permit, other station firsts were less tedious. It went on the air for the first time, Roney remembers, when he and three other students conducted an on-air equipment test at 2:00 one morning. Lacking a



Joseph Stempuzis, 70, contacts friends in Lithuania to gather news for his Lithuanian program Sunday mornings.

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The station has come a long way from its original 10-watt-output, which barely carried the signal beyond the campus. At 850 watts, the station can now be picked up throughout Greater Cleveland, and often beyond, especially in the evening.

The broadcast day lasts from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. (sign-off is two hours earlier during the summer), and for six of seven days each week, it begins with "Sonrise."

The station receives an annual $20,000 subsidy from the University, and raises about $7,500 more from listeners each spring through a radiothon. Two years ago, the administration shelled out an additional $22,000 for a new transmitter.

What you hear on the air is different now, too. While just five years ago, the station was playing mostly classical, rock, heavy metal and contemporary Christian rock music, today's listener can still find all of these on the WUJC dial, at some time or another, plus progressive, jazz, blues, modern and reggae music. If WUJC played only a single type of alternative music, says station manager Kevin Mulvihill, they'd be defeating the purpose of a college radio staton.

News is largely confined to a five-minute afternoon update on world and national events which comes by FAX machine from a syndicator. The weekly "Carroll Corner" program also covers on-campus events.

Mulvihill, a junior, can't understand why anyone wouldn't want to be a d.j. His own show—"M"—consists

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of modern music. With reggae music wafting through the office door, he apologizes for the disorganized appearance of the desks in the WUJC office—everyone uses each other's space, he says. In fact, there's a sense of sharing here that goes beyond meeting the challenge of broadcasting 20 hours daily. "We're all into music," he says.

David Reese, the station's general manager and faculty advisor, got his start in commercial radio, and later managed a 50,000-watt mega-station at Wabash Valley Community College in Southern Illinois. "We probably played to a lot of cornfields," he says.

This is his fourth year at John Carroll and WUJC, where he sees two types of student d.j.'s come through the door.

"One group really thinks somewhere down the lane, they're looking to get into the broadcasting, or communications, industry. They're looking at it as good experience, something they can put on a resume. I think there's another group of students who look at this as just a college activity, kind of like chess club. And the station has been set up so that we can address both types of student. We don't favor one over the other, and I think we have a pretty good mix on the air."

But student voices aren't the only ones you'll hear on WUJC.

Joseph Stempuzis, a 70-year-old retired county administrator who came to the U.S. from Lithuania in 1949 (after placing second in a nationwide contest for high school radio announcers in the spring of 1939), is one of about a half dozen hosts of weekend ethnic programs. He uses his weekly air time to help Lithuanians in the Greater Cleveland community preserve their ethnic heritage and remain informed about news from their homeland (and they, in turn, support the show by responding generously to the station's springtime fundraiser).

His broadcast each Sunday morning from 8-10 includes folk and popular music, children's stories and even interviews with Lithuanian rock bands. Each week at his home studio, he tapes a sermon from the Jesuit pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Fr. Gediminas Kijauskas, for broadcast on Sunday. Stempuzis thinks one reason for his show's popularity is the time slot: people listen before going to church.

He even has a news segment consisting of information he receives by phoning contacts in Lithuania and Germany. "I love this job," he says.

But if you tune in to 88.7-FM between 8-10 a.m. on Thursdays, you'll hear a show of an entirely different stripe. JCU biology professor Dr. Jeff Johansen hosts "Music for Asylums," which features experimental and progressive music.

While pursuing post-doctoral work at Washington State University, he joined the radio station, where he became familiar with various forms of avante garde music, including industrial music (now called "industrial dance" or "gothic disco"), which he describes as people who "dress up in black and play depressing stuff." Although he earned a doctorate in botany from Brigham Young University, this isn't music meant to nurture plants.

In the songs Johansen plays, you'll hear drum machines and "snippets" of dialogue. He'll often play the music while working in his office or lab, which generally prompts curiosity from his students. "They kinda wonder what I'm doing." But he doesn't play this music at home, he says.

"Some of it is kind of obnoxious."

The old WUJC broadcast studio in the Grasselli Tower, as it appeared in the 1970s.